

State of Maine | 131st Legislature
Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services
Testimony of Darcy Shargo on behalf of Maine Primary Care Association
February 29, 2024

Supporting:
LD 2175, “An Act to Improve Access to Affordable Prescription Drugs in Underserved Areas”

Sponsored by President Jackson

Senator Bailey, Representative Perry, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services, I am Darcy Shargo, Chief Executive Officer at Maine Primary Care Association (MPCA).

MPCA is a membership organization representing Maine's Community Health Centers (CHCs), also known as Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs). Maine's CHCs make up the largest independent primary care network in the state, providing high quality and equitable primary and preventive medical, behavioral, and dental health services for over 200,000 people (or 1 in 6 Mainers) at more than 80 service delivery sites around the State.

On behalf of the community health centers across the state, I come to you today respectfully to ask for your support of LD 2175, legislation that will provide much needed resources for health centers to improve access and expand pharmacy services in Maine.

As I am sure you know, Mainers face a critical shortage of access to affordable medications, especially in rural and underserved areas served by CHCs. Throughout the state, CHCs are seeing a dramatic decline in the number of retail pharmacies, and a reduction of hours for those still in operation, due to ongoing workforce and economic challenges. As is common of health centers, the CHCs want to build and expand pharmacy services to the communities that they serve; however [existing health center revenues and resources](#) are insufficient to support such development or expansion of current services.

As reported in the *Bangor Daily News* in the fall of 2023, state regulators fined Walgreens for multiple days of unreported closures at locations in Machias and Calais.¹ This is just one example of the barriers to access that we are facing in the most rural parts of our state. Across the state as pharmacies close or reduce hours, patients are unable to receive much needed medications. I am joined today by leaders from Maine’s CHC Network, and I know that they will be able to speak to the real-life impacts that pharmacy access issues are having for their patients in communities across the state.

LD 2175 would establish a grant program, overseen by the Office of Affordable Health Care, to provide support for CHCs to develop or expand their capacity to provide greater access to affordably priced drugs for their patients by increasing CHCs’ ability to deliver pharmacy services to those patients. One way to improve access is by setting up in-house pharmacy services, allowing for the added benefit of increasing overall coordination within the patient’s care team. The effects of this legislation would also allow FQHCs to address workforce issues related to pharmacy operations in their local communities by hiring much needed pharmacy staff.

¹ <https://www.bangordailynews.com/2023/10/02/down-east/walgreens-machias-calais-pharmacies-closures/>

Maine has reached a crisis point in its ability to provide patients with access to affordable, life-saving medications. It is essential to provide immediate funding support for Maine's FQHCs to develop and expand pharmacy services throughout the state.

We appreciate your consideration of our comments and thank President Jackson and the other cosponsors for bringing this important legislation forward. Please do not hesitate to contact me directly with any follow up questions.

Sincerely,

Darcy Shargo, MFA
Chief Executive Officer
Maine Primary Care Association
dshargo@mepca.org